

PE1604/U

Minister for Mental Health submission of 22 March 2017

Thank you for your letter regarding petition PE1604, and the opportunity to clarify the issues raised at the meeting of the Public Petitions Committee on 2 March 2017.

The terms of the review as originally established by Parliament, in section 37 of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 2015, were restricted to hospital patients receiving care or treatment for mental disorder.

I have agreed to extend the remit of the review beyond the requirements of the Act to look at the arrangements for investigating deaths of patients whose detention was suspended at the time of their death; and, as a result of the petition, the deaths of patients who were receiving care in the community under compulsory treatment orders. In such situations there is some degree of restriction or supervision, or active contact with healthcare services.

However, the review will not look at the arrangements for investigating the deaths of those people who complete suicide but who were not under the supervision of a healthcare service at the time. Scotland already has a robust system for reviewing all suspected deaths by suicide where the person had been in touch with mental health services in the 12 months prior to their death. Healthcare Improvement Scotland's Suicide Reporting and Learning System aims to assist NHS boards to improve the way that suicide reviews are carried out. Their system provides feedback to NHS boards on the effectiveness of their review process in order to drive improvement.

In late spring 2017 we will begin engagement with stakeholders regarding possible content of a future Suicide Prevention Strategy or Action Plan.

This engagement will build on the engagement we undertook on the forthcoming Mental Health Strategy, and on engagement already undertaken with stakeholders e.g. in academia, in the NHS and in the Third Sector who have a specific interest in suicide prevention. We aim to publish a new Suicide Prevention Strategy or Action Plan in late 2017 or early 2018.

In the meantime, whilst the timeframe of the existing Suicide Prevention Strategy (2013-16) has passed, its key themes (e.g. improving responses to distress; improving the NHS response to suicide; talking about suicide; and developing the evidence base) remain pertinent to continuing efforts to reduce the suicide rate; we will continue to work with stakeholders to implement the commitments under these themes.

The section 37 review is underway and my officials are in discussion with partner organisations as part of the scoping process. The Act requires that the review engages families where practicable, and through the review we will seek to understand their experiences of how deaths have been investigated and take account of their views. Meaningful engagement with families will offer an opportunity to gain valuable insight to what families need from review processes.

The review will be published by 24 December 2018.